

# Mythbusters

PAID PLASMA  
April 2016

In the early 1980s, Canadians learned that their blood supply had become tainted with HIV and Hepatitis C. Canadians lost faith in the blood collector at the time, the Red Cross. Canada's government created a new arm's length agency, Canadian Blood Services and authorized them to implement the recommendations of Justice Horace Krever which require blood be collected by only non-remunerated, voluntary donors. Now, it is the goal of the World Health Organization and many other international health agencies to have 100% voluntary blood and plasma collection globally by 2020.

Today, a new private, for-profit company called Canadian Plasma Resources is collecting plasma from people in Saskatchewan and giving them a \$25 gift card in exchange.

## SAFETY

*Donor profiles of blood and plasma don't matter because we are able to inactivate and remove viruses in manufacturing processes for plasma-derived products.*

FACT: Plasma and plasma products are extremely safe right now and we're able to inactivate known viruses. However, there will continue to be new blood-borne pathogens and like Zika, we may not be able to test for them. The only means to safeguard against unknown threats is to ensure a healthy donor population.<sup>1</sup> Studies have shown that paid donors have higher rates of infectious disease markers than unpaid donors<sup>2</sup> and when you start to compensate donors you give them a reason to lie about their health. Canadian Plasma Resources (CPR) has shown that they are not in search of the healthiest donors as they have set up their clinics in vulnerable communities with populations at higher risk of blood-borne pathogens.<sup>3</sup>

## CANADA HAS TOO MUCH PLASMA

*"Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec have determined that they are unable to collect sufficient plasma to meet today's plasma product needs through the volunteer model."<sup>4</sup>*

FACT: We haven't tried to collect enough plasma for medicines. CBS has been closing down plasma collection centres because they claim they're over collecting. We need to re-open closed facilities and start new ones to become self-sufficient.

## SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN CANADA

*"Over the past few years, there has been a consistent downward trend in the demand for plasma and based on our current projections we will need to collect approximately 10,000 fewer units next year."<sup>5</sup> And because of this, Canadian Blood Services closed their Thunder Bay plasma donation centre.*

FACT: We are not self-sufficient in our plasma supply. While Canada has enough plasma for fresh transfusions, we do not have enough plasma to create medicines. In order to collect more plasma, we need to open more plasma collection centers. Perhaps we could start by re-opening the plasma centre CBS closed.

*Collecting from paid donors will create Canadian "self-sufficiency" in plasma.*

FACT: Canadian Plasma Resources will sell our plasma to the United States. Canada will buy back the plasma once it is mixed with American plasma.<sup>6</sup> Once we have begun the process of selling our blood to the U.S. under trade agreements such as NAFTA we will not be able to store Canadian plasma for Canadians' use, we must continue to sell it to the US. In the event of a plasma crisis or a plasma shortage, Canada will not be able to safeguard our own plasma supply.

## CANADA'S SUPPLY OF PLASMA WILL BE INCREASED

*"A paid plasma market is essential to ensuring enough supply of the lifesaving therapies Canadians need".<sup>7</sup> "(Canadian Blood Services is) developing...strategies to increase the amount of plasma that we collect in this country".<sup>8</sup>*

FACT: Paying plasma donors decreases Canada's national voluntary supply. Studies have shown that once you begin to remunerate, people will no longer voluntarily donate.<sup>9</sup> CPR has admitted that they don't know how their remunerated plasma collection will affect the voluntary donor system in Canada.<sup>10</sup> If this is true, why are we allowing a private company to compete for plasma donors when CBS is trying to increase voluntary donations?

## PAID DONORS IN CANADA

*We already pay plasma donors in Canada*

FACT: The Cangene clinic in Winnipeg collects plasma from people with rare antibodies. This clinic has been in operation since 1984 and Krever made an exemption in his recommendations so that in such rare circumstances populations that had specialized blood could be compensated for their donation.

## WE PURCHASE BLOOD FROM PAID DONORS

*The majority of plasma-based medicines in Canada are imported from the United States or Europe from paid plasma donors. If we began paying donors in Canada we could stop purchasing from international markets.*

FACT: While Canada does buy the majority of our plasma-based medicines from the US or Europe which is often made from the plasma of paid donors, there is no evidence that paying donors in Canada will create our own self-sufficiency, in fact there are studies to suggest it will decrease our supply of donor blood and leave us unable to safeguard our own blood supply.

## SOLUTIONS

If Canada is to follow the Krever Inquiry we must try to collect all plasma through non-remunerated sources. We need to re-open plasma collection facilities closed by CBS and we need to start-up new voluntary, non-remunerated plasma centres across Canada. Currently there are only a few plasma collections centres in Canada: 2 in Alberta, 1 each in Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador. There are no collection centres in British Columbia or Manitoba.

### Canadian Health Coalition

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In Justice Krever's report into Canada's tainted blood scandal, several recommendations were offered:

1. That the Canadian blood supply be governed by five basic principles:
  - Blood is a public resource.
  - Donors should not be paid.
  - Sufficient blood should be collected so that importation from other countries is unnecessary.
  - Access to blood and blood products should be free and universal.
  - Safety of the blood supply system is paramount. (Recommendation #2)
2. Whole blood, plasma and platelets must be collected in sufficient quantities to meet domestic needs for blood components and blood products (vol. 3, Recommendation #2, p.1047)
3. Canadian plasma should be custom fractionated, in batches consisting only of Canadian plasma... (Vol. 3, Recommendation #5, p.1051)

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Currently, there are no FDA-licensed blood donor screening tests available to detect Zika virus. The best way to protect the US blood supply is to screen blood donors using a donor history questionnaire and asking about recent travel to areas where Zika is spreading. Centers for Disease Control.

<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/transmission/blood-transfusion.html> Last updated: March 15, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Poel et al. Paying for blood donations: still a risk? 2002.

<http://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/shingij/2r9852000001dj72-att/2r9852000001djp.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> In Ontario, CPR set up clinics next to a homeless shelter and a methadone treatment centre (<http://bit.ly/1qKikPJ>). In Saskatchewan they're located close to payday loan centres and pawn shops (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/canadian-plasma-resources-defends-1.3479654>)

<sup>4</sup> From a letter to the Canadian Health Coalition by Health Minister Jane Philpott (March 16th, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Blood Services.

<https://www.blood.ca/en/media/thunder-bay-clinic-announcement>

<sup>6</sup> CBC. The Current. Feb. 2, 2016 Episode Transcript.

<sup>7</sup> Minister Philpott, taking from a CBS statement

<sup>8</sup> CBC. The Current. No Obligation to work with For-Profit Plasma Clinics, says Canadian Blood Services.

<sup>9</sup> Kretschmer et al. Perspectives of paid whole and plasma donation. 2005.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16050162>

<sup>10</sup> "We believe collaboration between Canadian Plasma Resources (CPR) and national blood organizations is needed to assess the impact of paid plasma collections on unpaid whole blood donation rates." Canadian Plasma Resources. The Need for Source Plasma Production in Canada.